The DECORATIVE ARTS

of *The Fabulous Fox Theatre*

REDISCOVER THE FOX THEATRE

75TH ANNIVERSARY

CITY OF ATLANTA

55 TRINITY AVENUE, S.W
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30335-0300
TEL (404) 330-6100

December 26, 2004

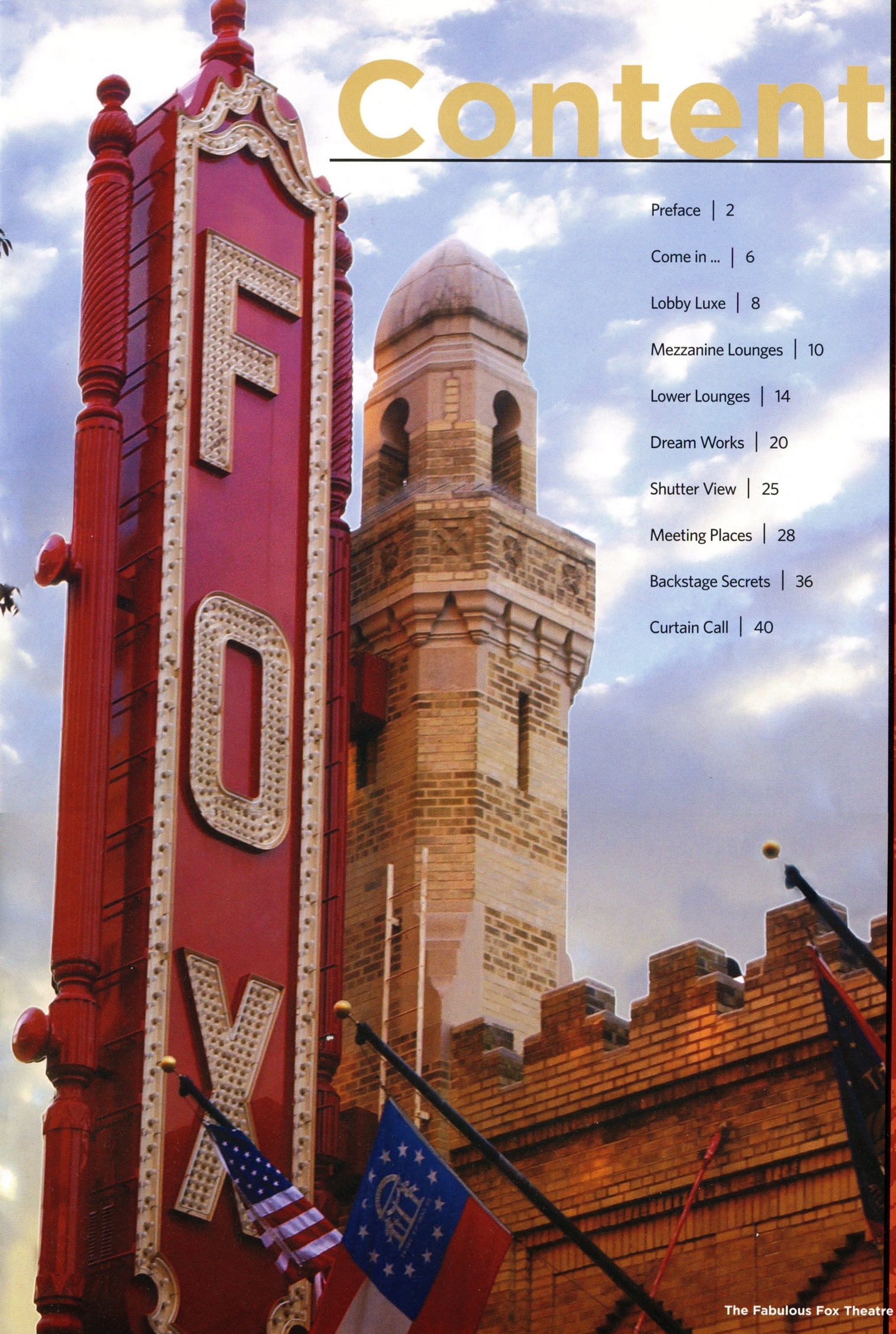
Greetings:

As mayor of Atlanta, it is my pleasure to congratulate The Fox Theatre for 75 years of dance, theater, film and so much more!

The Fox Theatre has contributed immensely to the cultural, social and economic wealth of the Atlanta community. Whether you are attending a black tie affair or having a romantic evening at a ballet performance, The Fox Theatre has been an integral part in the lives of Atlantans for decades.

This commemorative event is Atlanta's way of giving The Fabulous Fox the encore she deserves for providing a magnificent backdrop for countless laughs and moments of awe. The City of Atlanta salutes supporters, organizers and volunteers who ensure that generations of Atlantans can always experience the place where the South meets the ancient East.

On behalf of the people of Atlanta, I extend best wishes to The Fox Theatre family for a successful 75th Anniversary celebration. Enjoy Atlanta!



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PREFACE

BY CHRISTINE BORN

Shortly before The Fox Theatre opened on Christmas Day 1929, an enthusiastic newspaper writer called it "a holiday token from the gods of entertainment to Atlanta and the Southeast."

The reporter outlined the performance program, but predicted few in the audience would be focusing on the show. Instead, he warned readers, "don't go unprepared for the shock."

In words that would be echoed often in the 75 years following, he described what awaited those first audiences: "For this Fox Theatre, in the simplest and least patriotic terms possible, is a bewildering spectacle of sheer opulent magnificence."

Atlanta architect and preservationist John A. Busby Jr. agrees: "Most people, upon entering the theatre for the first time, forget what they have come to see, so awestruck are they by their surroundings." Busby has been involved with the preservation of the Fox since 1974 when, as president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, he was enlisted to help save the rundown theatre from demolition. Since then he has been active on the board of Atlanta Landmarks Inc., a non-profit foundation established to save the Fox and guarantee its continued preservation.

It is worth returning to that earlier reporter's words one more time: "It makes no difference whether you have been in the Roxy and the Paramount in New York or not. If you have seen a moon somewhere, that wouldn't make you indifferent to your first glimpse of the sun."

Those grand old New York movie palaces, the Roxy and Paramount, no longer stand. However, the occasion of this publication is to celebrate and recognize the 75th anniversary of Atlanta's Fox Theatre. At least three generations of Atlanta citizens have brought their children to the front of the stage, turned them around and pointed to the star-studded, blue-sky ceiling. The history of Atlanta's premier movie house and theatre is widely known and well-documented, especially the chapter involving its grass roots rescue from the wrecking ball and its restoration, which continues to this day. Aside from the necessary references to this history, this publication aims to give readers a greater appreciation and background of the lavish furnishings and artwork of The Fabulous Fox Theatre.

The Middle Eastern theme and mosque-like architecture of the building are mainly attributable to the fact that it originally was intended to be the Yaarab Mosque, the official meeting hall and headquarters of the local order of the Shriners fraternal organization, formally known as the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. Legend has it that the Shrine's chief potentate, Tom Law, instructed architect P. Thorton Marye to design a lasting monument that would "out Baghdad Baghdad." Marye was a principal in the local architectural firm Marye, Alger and Vinour, the winner of a 1927 competition to determine who would design the new building. Ollivier Vinour, however, is now credited with being the mosque's true creator. He was influenced by a variety of factors: his travels to Africa; two volumes of lithographs, *Egypt and Nubia* and *The Holy Land*, painted by David Roberts around 1838; postcards a friend brought back from a tour of Spain and the Middle East; and the then-recently discovered tomb and treasures of King Tut, which led to the popularity of everything Egyptian.

The final design of the building melded various Middle Eastern styles. The distinctive onion domes and minarets suggest a Moorish village. Four-center, lancet, ogee and horseshoe arches are used in many applications. The ornate

DRAMATIC SKYLINES

A copper-roofed minaret reaches to the sky, as if calling people to prayer. In fact, the tall slender towers on mosques usually have one or more projecting balconies from which a muezzin summons the people to pray (preceding pages).

CASTING LARGE SHAPES

The formed metal onion dome (right) is topped with the half moon of the Shriners, an Arabic symbol. The half dome below has copper cladding over lightweight concrete. Both are hollow, big enough to hold another party room.

interior features elements from Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Persia, Spain and Arabia.

Certainly, another little-mentioned influence must have come from the Gothic Revival and the later Arts and Crafts Movement, still popular during this period. Striped polychromatic brickwork, which appears on the exterior of the Fox, was popularized by G.E. Street in his *Brick and Marble from Northern Italy* and by John Ruskin in *The Stones of Venice.* Ruskin also influenced the use of Venetian Gothic details, which can be found in the Fox's furnishings as well.

Architectural historian Boyd Coons, Executive Director of the Atlanta Preservation Center, describes the exterior and interior of the Fox as a perfect ensemble. "Nothing jumps out as being the essential thing. It all works together and what stuns you is the overall effect.

"The architecture wouldn't work without the decoration and the furniture, and vice versa," he continues. "Each part contributes to the whole, which is part of being a work of art. Each sequence adds to the overall work. Here, it is as if jewels are being placed in their proper setting, beginning with the beautiful kiosk at the main entrance."

Coons refers to the principle of purpose — a doctrine of the Arts and Crafts movement — when discussing the Fox. "You have what is appropriate for purpose here," he says. "There was an understanding of the suspension of disbelief, the ascendance to another realm."

The concept of being transported is two-fold, as Coons explains: "One of the really marvelous things about the Fox, even before you see a performance, is the transition you experience that prepares you emotionally and intellectually to receive the performance in the proper mood." He is not speaking only of the effects of the illusionist elements that create the fairytale-like experience, but of the individual's role in responding to these elements.

"The architectural-theatrical experience predates 19th century ideas of decoration, but both incorporate the evocative idea of what you are requiring of a person. The intricacy, the mystery, the inspirational elements — all give evidence of a multi-layered life and existence."

The Arts and Crafts movement was not just about design; it incorporated ideas about social and political life as well as modes of production. Good design and fine craftsmanship were thought to reflect the moral health of a society.

"By means of appearances [art gives] the illusion of a loftier reality," said Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American philosopher, poet and humanitarian.

"Of course, we don't have royalty in America," Coons says. "Here, everyone has sovereignty and everyone is royalty in a place like the Fox. It celebrates the value of each individual."

Movie theatre magnate William Fox understood the importance of theatrical showmanship. Atlanta was part of his grand plan to build a super movie palace empire across the country, and the mosque's proposed design fit in well with his lavish concept. He entered into a lease of the theatre auditorium with the Shriners; the arrangement changed drastically during the economic turmoil of the early 1930s but led to what was to have been the Yaarab Temple becoming The Fox Theatre.

William Fox's wife, Eve, decorated the public space, and today her work is looked upon as masterful. The Chicago firm of Ketcham & Rothschild produced most of the furniture, much of which has been beautifully and meticulously restored.

Molly Fortune, Preservation Department Director, oversees an annual budget of more than $1.2 million and takes care of all 250,000 square feet of interior space and the total inventory of furnishings. She offers a different perspective: "We are charged with making the trees look good so when people come in they see the forest. But, there are so many trees."

It is not a complaint; rather she is referring to what is obvious to all who have visited this treasure palace. "Every time you come, you see something else," Fortune says. "This building has a soul and you feel it every time you walk past each hand-painted piece."

The charge to maintain so many fine pieces of art, which are still in constant use, is demanding. It requires meticulous attention to detail and historical accuracy. Fortune and Historic Collections Manager Michele Schuff must find craftsmen of, in many cases, long lost arts who can make an exact replica of an ornate glass shade or recreate the crewel work on the back of a throne chair.

The pride of those who work and volunteer at the Fox for its continued preservation is contagious. "The Fox is Atlanta's greatest preservation success and the vehicle for other preservation," Coons says. "It helps us understand the importance of buildings like this in the urban environment; it adds to the rich texture of life, improving the quality and experience of life in the city."

The Fox has come full circle. Today, as it did on that Christmas Day 75 years ago, the theatre draws awed crowds to its popular shows, filling the plush seats with patrons who look with equal amazement at their surroundings as those early pioneers. It is appropriate here to let the last word go to General Manager Ed Neiss, who took his position 23 years ago, in 1981. "At the time, I called [The Fox Theatre] a sleeping giant. It was primed to really make an impact in the city."

Under Neiss' direction, the theatre has become a successful venue, attracting the best of Broadway and other entertainment to Atlanta, and producing enough revenue to fund annual renovations.

Neiss, however, credits the theatre's healthy state to more than great entertainment and his management. He, too, refers back to the vision of William Fox and the spectacle that is The Fabulous Fox Theatre. In the words of this showman: "It's really a night out on the town because it's an attraction in and of itself."

This publication is the third in a series of commemorative editions produced in cooperation with and by permission of The Fox Theatre. The other editions, "The Story of An Atlanta Icon" *and* "Great Performances" *are available at The Fox Theatre or from Atlanta Metropolitan Publishing.*

Ponce de Leon Ave

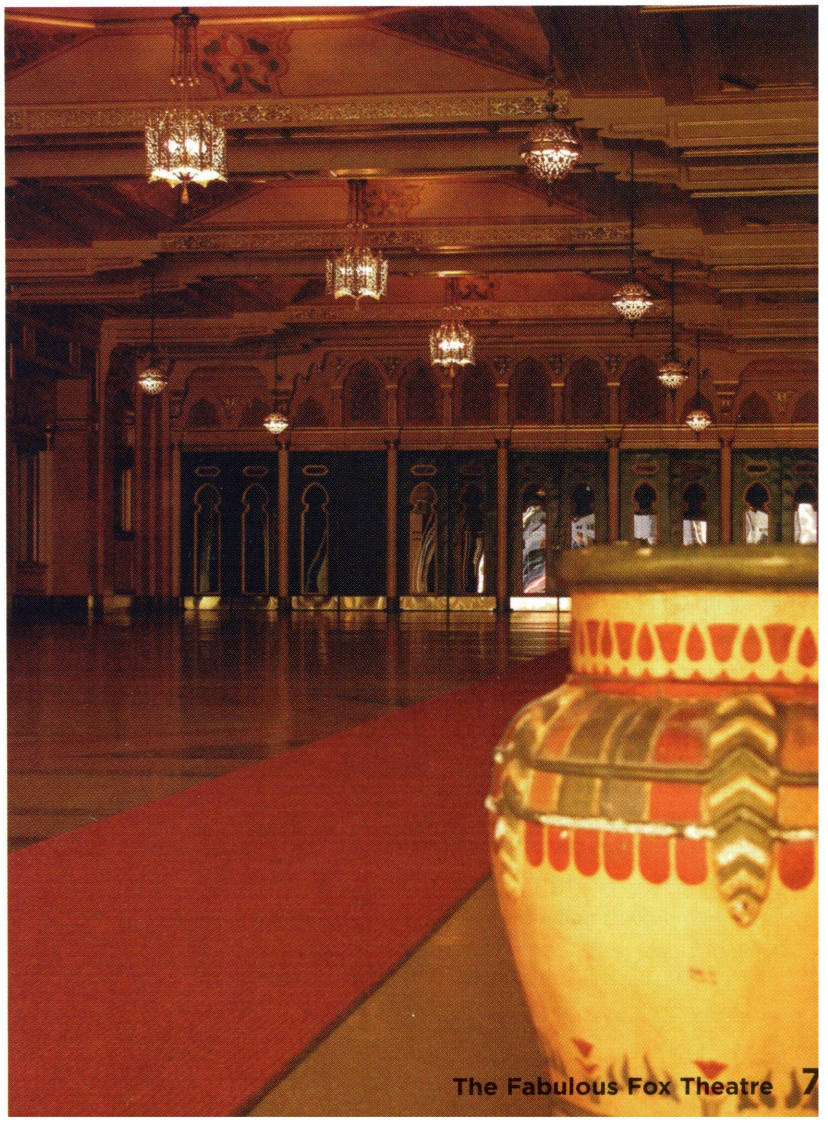
ROYAL CARRIAGE

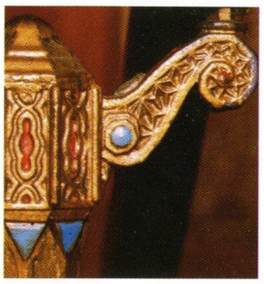
No, it is the ticket kiosk. The ornate, solid brass booth (facing page) is the first introduction most theatergoers have to the Fox's exotic furnishings.

COME IN...

Originally, guests were to enter the mosque from an entrance on Ponce de Leon Avenue. William Fox decided to use the 140-foot-long arcade (or loggia) on Peachtree Street as the main entrance for the theatre and erected a huge marquee, flanked by a pair of mini-minarets. The original marquee had letters made of milk glass that were hand-mounted onto a black background. The current marquee is styled after the 1929 version, but is computer controlled.

The arcade not only provided cover from the elements, but evoked an illusory magic carpet ride — an image reinforced by the long red carpet runner — drawing patrons further away from reality into the fairy tale world within. Framed show posters; large, colorful urns; textured plastic reliefs on the walls; filigreed hanging lamps; elaborate gilt and stenciled ceiling beams; tile work and terrazzo flooring prepared them for what awaited inside.



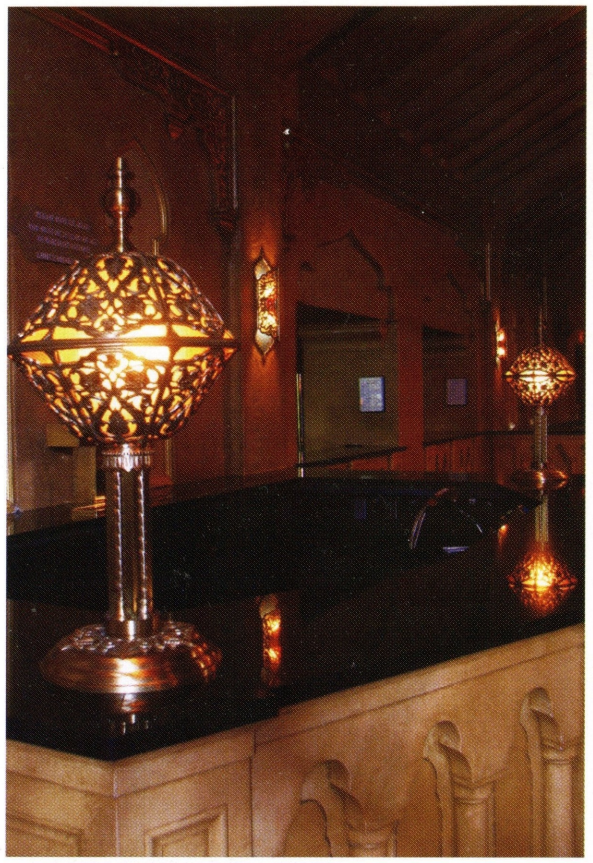


LOBBY LUXE

PALATIAL AND GRAND

Dimensions and decor of the main lobby are visible when photographed devoid of people and booths (top). "Bullet and bomb" lamp (left) is named after its shape. Raised display booths of the merchandise table (center) resemble towers with arches. Even the brass handrail brackets get special treatment (center). View of stenciled ceiling pattern (right) includes a base of hanging star lanterns.

After making the transition from the outside world through the arcade, patrons truly enter a different realm as they step into the main lobby. First-time visitors often stop just past the ticket collectors, as if gathering or preparing themselves as one does upon entering a temple. It is here that the architecture and the decor come together to create the transportive quality that was the intent of its designers. Not only would patrons be delivered from reality, but they would be treated in a princely manner. The main lobby, considered restrained in comparison to William Fox's other theatres, carries all the themes found in other rooms of the theatre: Moorish cutouts, decorated beams, filigreed lamps and star patterns. Red velvet curtains and red carpeting contribute to the lush, rich environment. Two sweeping staircases go to the upstairs loges and dress circles, continuing the lobby's spacious ballroom feel. Massive urns, made of gilt and glazed plaster, flank the staircase to the lower lounges. Tile fountains, like those used for washing before prayer in Middle Eastern temples, are included in this authentic "atmospheric" palace. More practical for today's realities but still given a touch of illusion, the merchandise table and wine bar mimic elements in the room, blending the more recent additions into the original decor.



PARLOR ARTS & CRAFTS

The Fox symbol and the Shriners' half-moon with star symbol are woven into the carpet used throughout the main theatre, an example of the close relationship William Fox had with the Shriners, the original builders who wound up sharing space with the movie palace for almost 20 years. The mezzanine serves as a waiting parlor of sorts. Tent-like curtains and elaborate furnishings create a more intimate, though no less regal, space than the main lobby and auditorium. Cut metalwork globe lamps anchored to the bar (top left) are copies of originals found throughout the theatre. The colorful archway bordered with faux stonework holds a brass directional sign with a frosted glass panel (center left). The walnut, gilt throne chair (above) and couch (left) have carved arms and panels, and are covered in deep red mohair velvet with custom crewel-embroidered backs. Standing beside the chair is a Venetian floor lamp with decorative Bakelite panels.

EGYPTIAN EXOTICISM

Matching walnut pharaoh armchairs are exact replicas of King Tut's throne chairs. Each has a curved back with a painted carved relief of a seated King Tut and his wife, painted carved borders, and winged lion head arms with chevron carving; all four feet have griffin paws. All fireplaces in the Fox are fake, and all feature different Flint Faience tile. This one (facing page) is more fanciful with purely decorative hieroglyphics and towering plaster columns.

MEZZANINE LADIES' LOUNGE

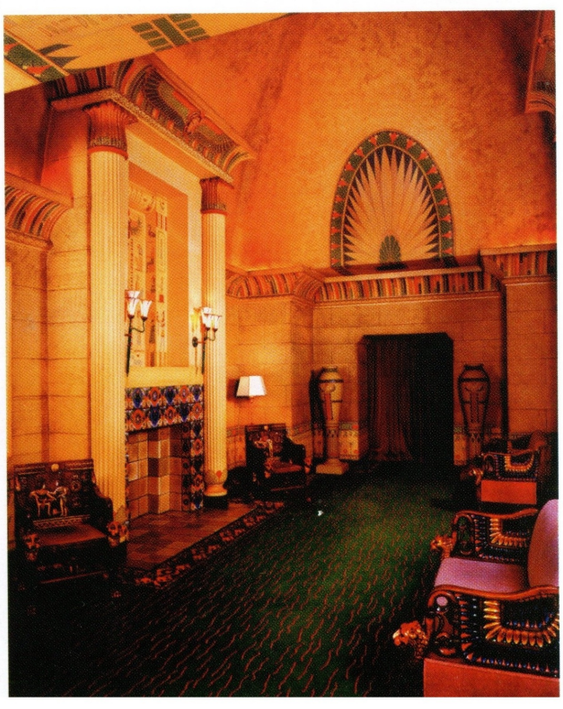
The most lavish furnishings are in the ladies' and men's rooms on the Mezzanine and the lower levels. The Egyptian Lounge on the mezzanine belongs to the women; the Arabian Room is for men. Inversely, the Lower Ladies' Lounge has a Moorish theme, designed after Arabian harems; the Gentlemen's Lounge on the lower level is a male take on the Egyptian theme. Royally appointed, indeed, they have been featured on several "best restroom" lists; patrons have been known to refer affectionately to the "theatrics of visiting the bathroom" when heading to the lounges.

The interior decor and furnishings mix style elements from Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Persia, Spain and Arabia. When the Fox was built, excitement over the then-recently discovered tomb and treasures of King Tut swept the country, influencing everything from architecture to fashion. People were traveling to Africa and the Middle East, bringing back tales of exotic lands.

The Egyptian Lounge, with its bright colors and light mood, is an almost universal favorite. Certainly, William Fox's wife, Eve, who decorated the public spaces and purchased the furnishings, must have enjoyed decorating this room above most others. The matching chairs on either side of the fireplace are replicas of Tutankhamen's throne chairs. The Egyptian scarab and sunburst design in the tile and carpet is a copy of the ceiling pattern of the tomb of Neferhotep Haremhab (1348-1315 BC) in Thebes.

EGYPTIAN FANFARE

Decorative urn (above) repeats scarab and lotus blossom designs. Faux finished plaster bas relief (top right) is glazed to give it the look of stone. Bench seat (above center) has gilt and decorative painting on end piece; the fabric, based on the original pattern, was reproduced in 2003 by Neo Design. Detail of lamp (above right) shows flared-neck with stylized lotus blossoms. The plaster walls of the room (right) have been scored, painted and glazed to appear old. Overall, the appearance of the room is the same as when the theatre opened.



MEZZANINE
GENTLEMEN'S LOUNGE

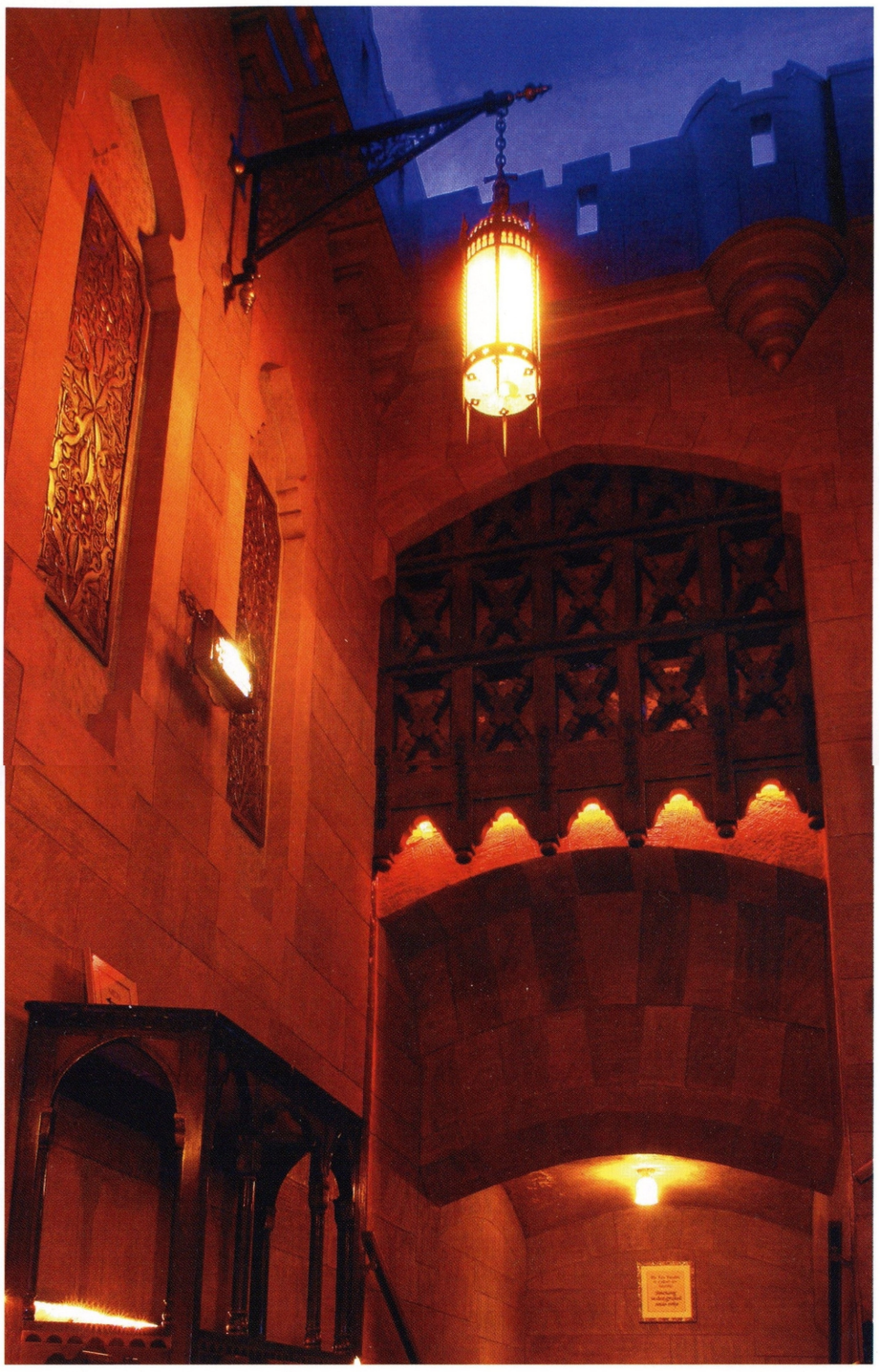
The Arabian Room has a heavier Moorish masculine look; faux plaster beams lower the ceiling as opposed to the columns of the Egyptian Lounge which draw viewers' eyes up. The furnishings, though still exuding richness and wealth, are more earthy. Still, common elements contribute to a sense of continuity in design: velvet cushions, painted wooden trim on chairs, stenciled trim, arches, keyhole window with grille, and Faience tiles. Various standing lamps also share common details, including paneled art glass shades with red and orange tracery, and wrought iron supports with scrollwork.

ARABIAN ARTS

Walnut cabinet (top) has arcaded molding, gilt fielded panel doors with painted arabesques, and an arched base with a platform stretcher — all picked out in gilt. The false window over the bench seat (above) has a plaster grille with faux wood finish. Bronze escutcheon and doorknob (left) are found on doors throughout the theatre.

STAIRWAY TO LOWER LOUNGES

The descent to the lower level lounges plays on the atmospheric look of the auditorium, and incorporates designs found throughout the building. Many people, watching their steps, miss the overhead sky lined with parapets — if they do look up, they might feel as if they had stepped into another area of the enclosed walls of the palace. The effect is still one of having been transported to another world, far from the one outside these thick walls. Here, again, are the familiar arched windows (and arched furniture pieces), faux wood grillwork, hanging lanterns, fanciful arabesque panels and plaster walls glazed to look like ancient stone.



CASTLE COMPANIONWAY

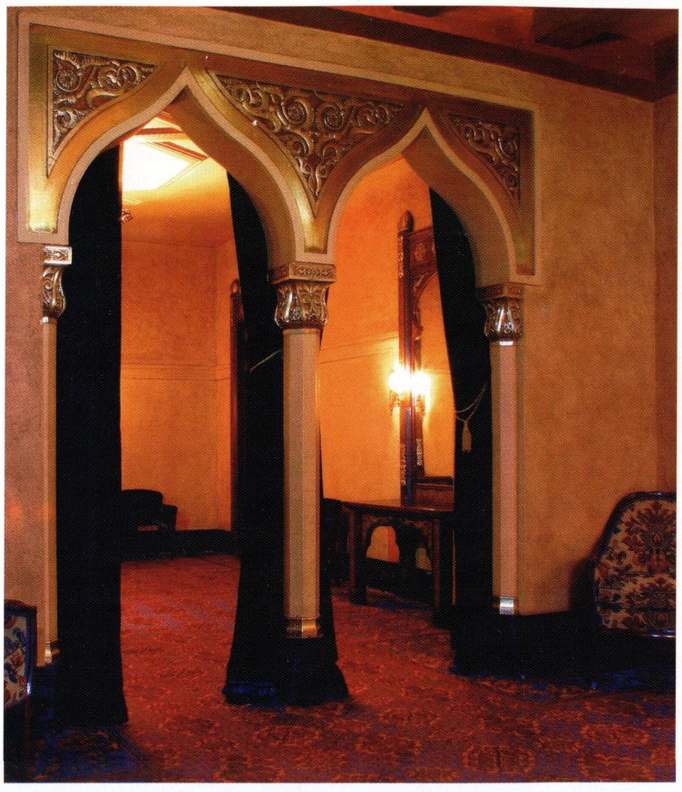
Even the stairwell gets the royal treatment: Original urn (above left) is gilt plaster; inset (right) shows painted details. Painted and lit sky serves to open space (above right) — another example of design being more than merely decorative.

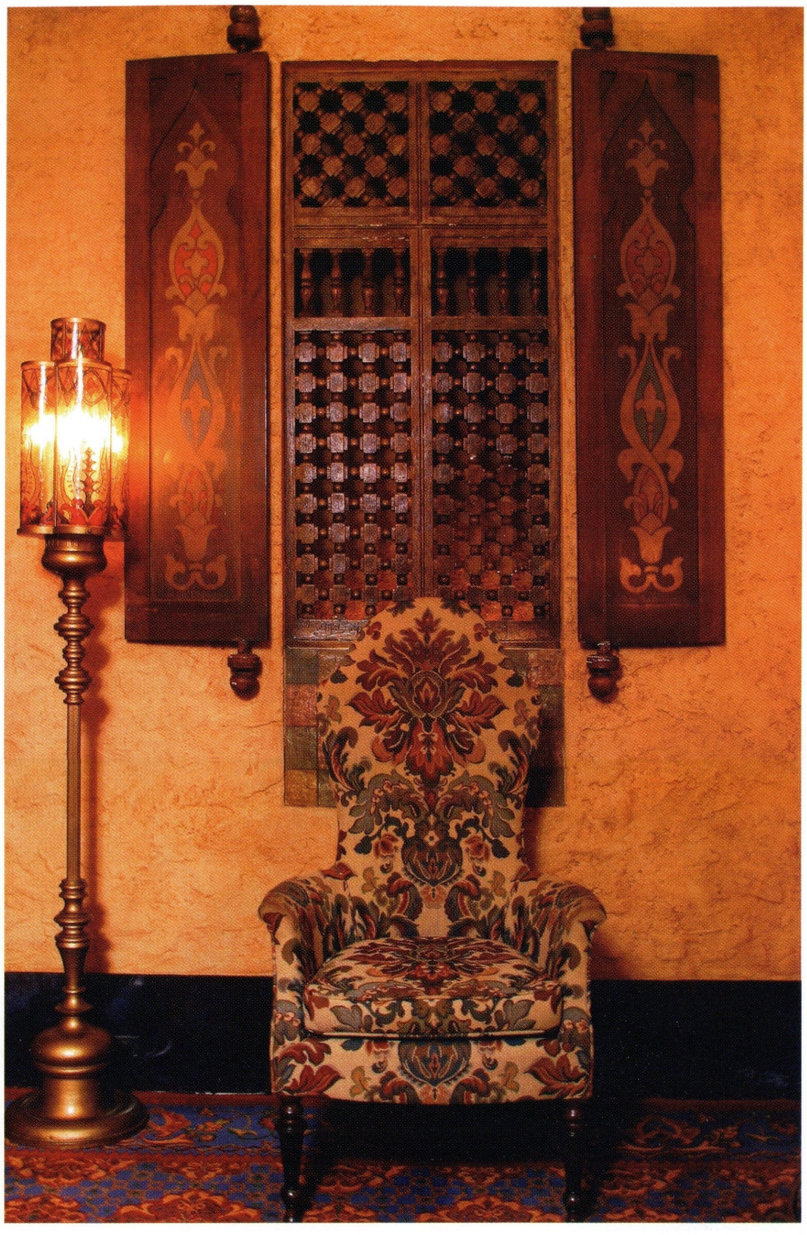
MEN'S LOWER LOUNGE

PHARAOH FANFARE

Settee (top) makes a strong statement. Pharaoh design (above left) decorates a bronze lamp. View of lounge (above center) includes "Egyptian" grand fauteuil; close-up side view shows radical design of carved and painted flowerhead ornaments, and bulb feet. The same fan-shaped motifs are seen in a paneled, stained-glass lamp (above right). The stylized royal sepulcher (facing page) with fluted column is very art deco.

The men get the Egyptian treatment in the Gentlemen's Lower Lounge; both the room and its furnishings are darker and more masculine than the ladies' version on the mezzanine level. Patterns and colors, however, are repeated, especially in the stylized art deco sepulcher, which symbolizes the king or pharaoh. The architectural, ornamental column has stylized fans and scrolls above a petaled head; the fluted column rises from a stepped base. It is painted in earth tones, with green tile cast in stone and gesso. Set against the stepped walls, it reminds viewers of the columns and soaring wall surrounding the Egyptian Lounge fireplace. Here, too, are the pharaoh images, lotus blossoms, chevrons and hieroglyphics, used on walls, doors, lamps and chairs. Both the walnut three-seat settee and the walnut "Egyptian" grand fauteuil have carved and painted flowerhead ornaments. The settee has a rectangular show-wood back in three upholstered panels with gold palmetted finials and a central ornament with gilt fluting and acorns; its arms have chevron carving and carved, painted lotus flowers. While the fabrics and designs are different, the seating in both lounges features similar pierced and carved frames. The repetition reinforces the overriding theme.





LADIES' LOWER LOUNGE

ROOM FOR A HAREM

Stars are a recurring motif, as are stylized flowers, used in the gilt trim and stenciled panel of the keyhole door (facing page). Moorish arched passageways (top left) lead to the powder room. Venetian armchair is flanked by Venetian gilt metal floor lamp (top right); the lamp has a quadrupled Bakelite shade featuring a scroll design in red, orange and gold, and a fluted column with an inverted bell form base. Overall view (above left) shows grouped seating, which invites conversation.

A prominent feature in the Ladies' Arabian Lounge is the ornate keyhole door, a real door which no longer serves any function; its painted wood is grained to highlight the decorative work. The Moorish harem theme is further enhanced by false plaster shutters, painted to look like wood; curtained and pillared arches, and a ceiling with curved panels resembling billowing fabric. The lounge mixes motifs — the powder room is of Gothic design. Heavy dressing tables have mirrors with Arabic mosque-shaped plates; delicate fan-shaped sconces are set into carved, painted and gilt strapwork frames. The Venetian armchairs, or bergere, have tall cartouche backs with upholstery-filled arms and loose seats, covered in a textured weave with a large stylized flower design. Peacock blue mohair fabric covers an upholstered settee and armchairs gathered in the center of the room around an octagonal table with a black slate top. The same fabric covers a built-in bench with decorative stencil patterns. The original furniture throughout the building was manufactured by Ketcham and Rothschild of Chicago; most fabrics have been reproduced to replace worn and soiled upholstery.

GOLDEN GLOW

The auditorium is bathed in soft, warm light from many hanging lamps, well-placed sconces, overhead "stars" (tiny 11-watt bulbs above 4-inch crystals) and inset fixtures. Along with the generous use of gilt on the decorative structures, the effect is that of twilight. Floral patterns in the sandblasted amber glass wall fixture (facing page) are modified and repeated in other installations; this one is among some 30 identical lights along the back columns of the auditorium.

STAGE CRAFT

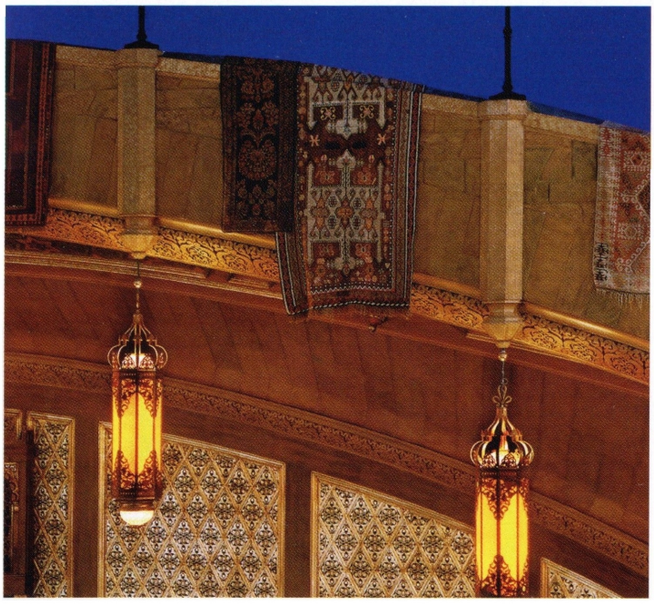
Giant filigreed trefoil windows (below) at each end of the stage under the proscenium appear to be exclusive box seating but instead mask pipe organ chambers.

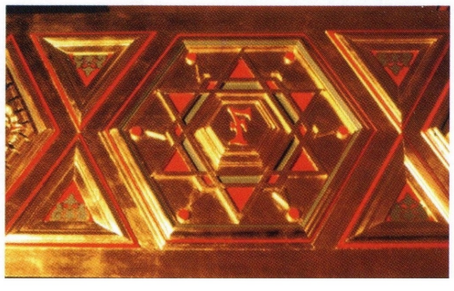
DREAM WORKS

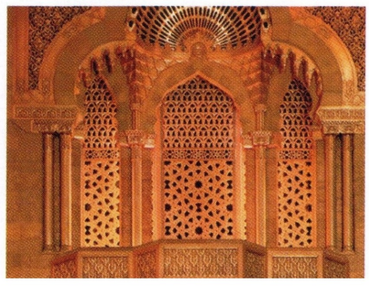
The auditorium is a magical creation, a combination of the atmospheric style found in movie palaces built between 1920 and 1935 and trompe l'oeil, well suited to its original intent to transport movie audiences to another world. Created to resemble an ancient Middle Eastern courtyard, it stands as a work of art in itself, an elaborately themed and fabricated stage set for the celluloid screen it framed. The castellated walls capped with parapets and turrets are faux finished and made of plaster. The stage is topped with a proscenium arch elaborately decorated with gilt plaster. The dazzling jeweled drop curtain, with its Moorish design, is as intricate as tapestries hanging in museums; it shares the stage with a more traditional, but still dramatically beautiful, gold-embellished red velvet main curtain. Beyond the painted ultramarine sky with twinkling stars (96 lights in all; about a third of them have heat sensors that make them dim and brighten, adding to the illusion) is a plaster-covered steel mesh canopy, painted to look like a canvas tent. Set above the gallery seats, it functions as a funnel, collecting sound and bouncing it back into the auditorium, a primary reason for the theatre's excellent acoustics. The structure was built by Swedish craftsmen from Ohio. Ropes and a stripe pattern were stenciled onto the tent, adding to its authentic look. Star lamps finish the theme.

FORM AND FUNCTION

Seating fit for a king or queen: Every Fox theatre had its own distinct end standards, some wired to be lit. In Atlanta, each bronze standard is decorated and hand-painted in art deco egg-and-dart design (above and right). Mosaic-like decorative designs are actually painted plaster (facing page, top left). Prayer rugs add to the atmosphere; the third rug on either side of the stage has a panel removed from the center that houses a speaker with the front painted to appear to be part of the rug (next page, bottom left). The palace-like theatre lanterns hanging from the stage bridge are reproductions of ones found in the St. Louis Fox Theatre; they also appear in the original elevations of Atlanta's Fox.







A GRAND MUSIC BOX

Custom-made for The Fox Theatre in 1929 by M. P. Möller Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland, the giant Möller theatre organ, familiarly and affectionately known as Mighty Mo, is considered the theatre's crown jewel, a masterpiece of organ design. It is the second-largest theatre organ in the world, surpassed in size by the Wurlitzer at New York's Radio City Music Hall. It boasts 42 ranks, four manual and 376 stop tabs. The organ's 3,622 pipes, spread out over five chambers, range in size from a ballpoint pen to 32 feet tall and big enough around for a person to stand in. Powered by a 75-horsepower motor, the electro-pneumatically operated instrument is so vast it has real instruments contained in it such as a marimba, xylophone and glockenspiel. It can also produce sounds resembling a clarinet, trumpet, saxophone and all other orchestral instruments, as well as sounds such as thunder, chimes, a fire bell and a steamboat whistle. The organ's keyboard can be used remotely to play the theatre's grand piano (which is not an original piece). Besides its impressive range, Mighty Mo is a beautiful box piece, trimmed with 22-carat decorative gilt and colorfully painted designs that glow with a warm patina when lit.

THE MÖLLER ORGAN

The elaborate and complicated instrument (top right) was rebuilt from the inside out, including more than 36,000 feet (nearly seven miles) of new wire. Decorative panels (above center) were regilt in 22-carat gilt and paint. Then Technical Director Joe Patten initially began the restoration in 1963; the organ was later fully restored with a grant from the late Ben Massell, a devotee of the Fox Theatre. Pipes are hidden behind elaborate screened chambers (above right).

SHUTTER VIEWS

Michael Portman has been the unofficial "house photographer" of The Fox Theatre since 1991. His Fox photographs have appeared in numerous publications and are used in the majority of the theatre's promotional material. An architect whose focus has been photographing structures around the world, he is the son of well-known Atlanta architect John Portman. Here, he shares his behind-the-lens view of Atlanta's ornate icon.

What made you decide to photograph The Fox Theatre so extensively?
The Fox had used other photographers and could not get the results they were looking for. Mary Catherine Martin was the historical architect at the Fox at the time, and wanted me to photograph it in a new way. I was asked to come up with a method in which it [the photo image] would look like what the eye saw.

Your photographs are quite haunting, and capture the depth and almost mystical atmosphere of the Fox's interior spaces. What was your method?
I grew up with architecture my whole life. I know what an architect wants to see. I think you have to be an architect to be a photographer of architecture. I didn't use fill lights; I didn't want flashbulbs going off. I wanted to use all natural light, as you see it. I used three-, five-, six-minute exposures. For the panorama looking from the stage out to the theater seating, I used an 11-minute exposure. Mainly, I used a 4 x 5 tripod-type camera. Fortunately,

the Fox is built on solid granite so I had no movement problems for the long exposures. By not using added light, I was able to generate the proper images.

What were the challenges in photographing such a large, complex and ornate structure?
Most architectural photography is more of the same, whereas the Fox was a real challenge. It took an extreme amount of time, [for example] being able to capture the true colors. I had to use f-stops of 16-32 in order to capture the detail. It also took the cooperation of the Fox staff. I had to have the ability to control traffic, especially during the long exposures. For some shots, I had to get into some tight spaces. To photograph the organ, I climbed into the pipes.

How long have you been working on this project?
I started in 1991 and I've been photographing it a shot at a time as each section is refinished. What they've done is rebuilt the Fox from the inside out, and every time they finished a section, I'd go in and shoot it so we'd have a continuing look from the same person.

What are you hoping to convey to those viewing your photographs?
I want people to feel they have actually been there.

What does the Fox mean to you?
It's unique. You don't see much like it today, unless you go into old theatres and they are disappearing fast. I am enthralled with the detail and quality of the workmanship. One of the reasons I like the Fox so much is it is such a departure, or vice versa; Gothic-Renaissance is popular again. Its one-of-a-kind period pieces are part of the charm — the urns and chairs with the crazy color schemes.

What is your favorite photo from your Fox shoots?
The photo taken from the stage looking out at the audience. The curtains were open so I could use the lights. I'm a lover of instant gratification and when I upload a Polaroid and I know it's going to be a fantastic shot, that's what turns me on about it. Once I'm done with it, I rarely look at it anymore.

OPEN SESAME

Invitation to another world: This archway on Ponce de Leon Avenue was the original entranceway for the Shriners. Designed in the Moorish or Middle Eastern Revival Art Deco style, it is made of coral stone, which is used throughout the theatre. If you look closely, you can see small seashells and mollusks.

PANORAMIC VIEW

The photo on the preceding pages is Portman's favorite, a rare view that captures the entire auditorium space. Many performers confess to being overwhelmed upon seeing the audience wrapped around them amidst the grandeur of the theatre.

CAPTURING MOODS

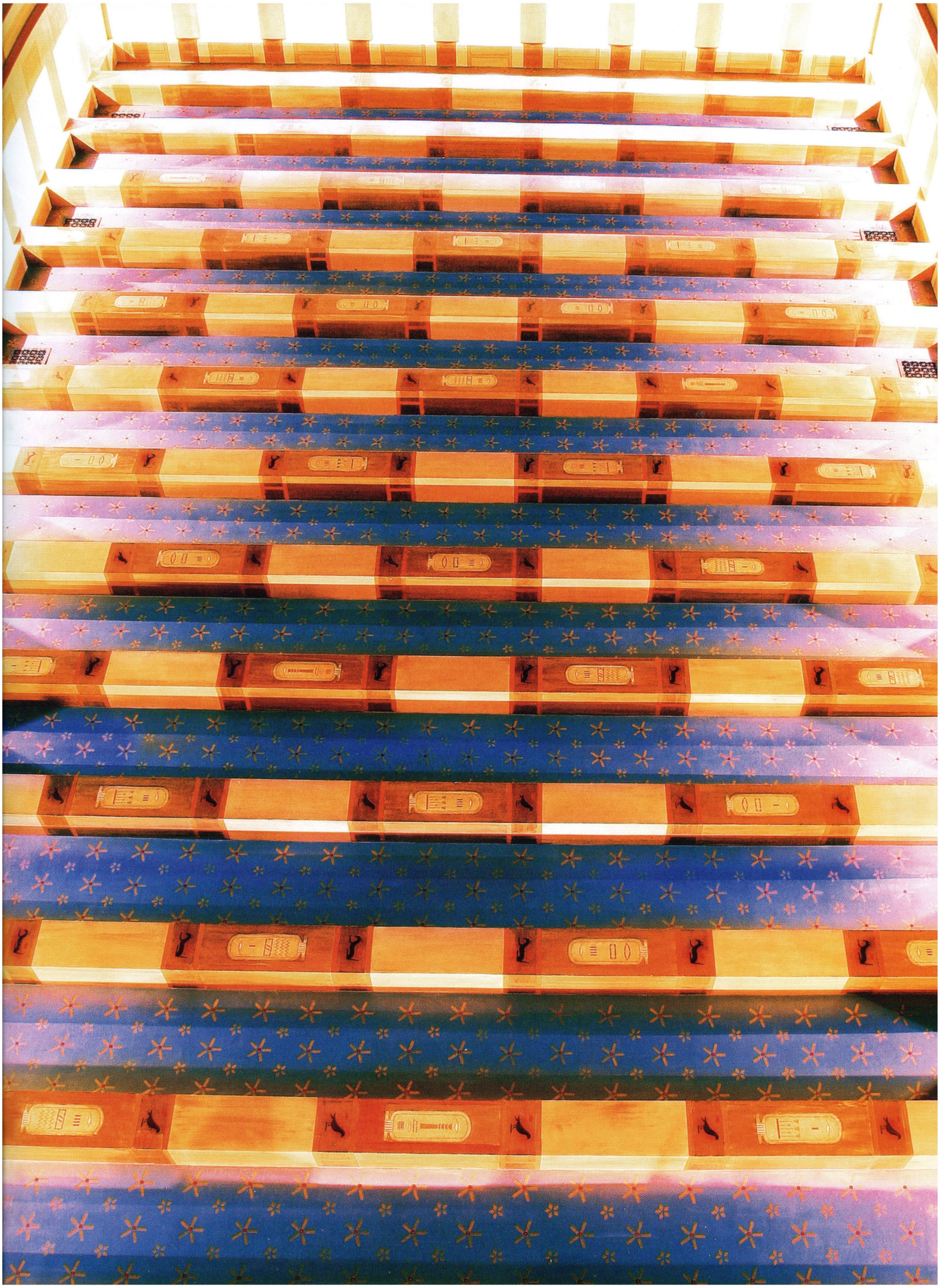
Portman climbed to the top of a nearby building to get this exterior photograph, showing the theatre set against its modern backdrop (top). At this angle, the building's profile clearly shows the architect's intent to suggest a Moorish village with its various shapes — arches, onion domes and minarets. Another favorite view (left) is this one of the Dress Circle Promenade with its whalebone arches. Fountain tiles (above) were made by Flint Faience & Tile Company, a division of AC Spark Plug Company.

TILE WORKS

Persian-design tiles (right) made by Flint Faience, painted using the "de querda seca" technique, add to the elegant beauty of the stairwell to the ballrooms (facing page). The doors to the Grand Stair (below) have the Fox "F" set into the stenciled pattern. The six-sided star symbol is found in the carpeting throughout the main theatre, alongside the Shriners' half moon and star symbol.

MEETING PLACES

Architect Ollivier Vinour designed a series of seemingly separate buildings, linked by open courtyards to ballrooms, meeting rooms and lounges. The visitor becomes, in effect, a traveler moving through mysterious landscapes. While the main lobby and auditorium serve to prepare the audience for the show they have come to see, the Egyptian Ballroom and Grand Salon act as dramatic backdrops to social and civic functions. The well-lit, clean lines of the stairway up to the meeting and reception rooms signal a purpose different from that of the entertainment levels; the stairway acts as a transition, easing visitors from the world of artifice back to reality. Amidst all the picturesque embellishments and theatrical themes, these rooms remind us that the Fox was conceived as the headquarters of the Shriners fraternal organization.



EGYPTIAN BALLROOM

VISUAL PARADISE

The center of the carpet in the Egyptian room acts as a "reflecting pool" of the stars painted on the ceiling (facing page). Wings of Osiris (top) is a gilt and glazed plaster panel set above the stage (above left). Close-up (center right) shows detail of fireplace panel, which is gilt with aluminum leaf and glazed. Scarab or dung beetle symbols (above center) delight most people. Stenciled pattern (above right) is under the balcony near the entrance doors.

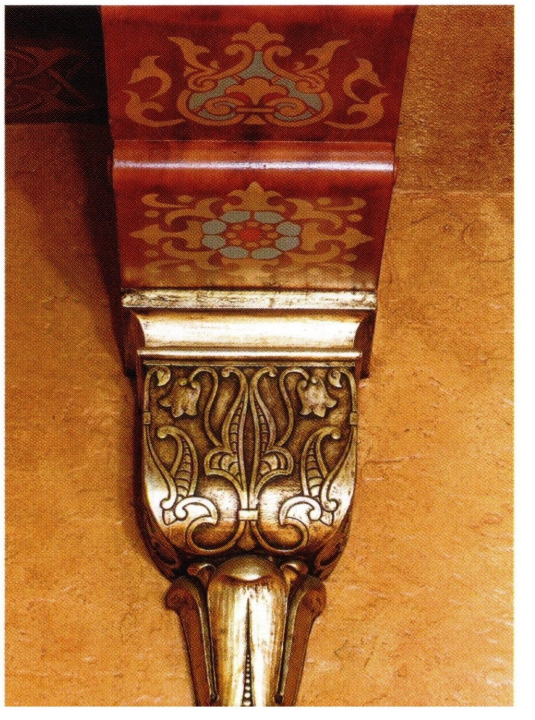
The 7,500 square foot Egyptian Ballroom rivals the auditorium in its fulfillment of a theme — in this case, based on the ancient Egyptian temple at Karnak. The room's focal point is the dramatic, vaulted stage featuring a plaster intaglio panel depicting Ramses II with a conquered enemy. The artificially lighted clerestory ceiling appears to let in natural light. Stars are stenciled on the ceiling (reminiscent of the auditorium's star-studded sky); cartouches on the plaster beams are real hieroglyphic symbols, though they mean nothing as they appear. But the hieroglyphics on the underside of the balcony say, "Welcome you who is bringer of joy." Two large plaster scarabs, or dung beetles, decorate the balcony overhang. Symbol of the Sun God Ra, the scarab was thought to ward off evil; each holds sun discs and is surrounded by the wings of Osiris, god of the Underworld, Afterlife and Resurrection. The vulture symbol above the stage is Horus, the god of a united Egypt, the fertility god, the god of the Conquerer. The motif also appears on the border of the carpet. Fan lamps and ceiling fixtures have seedy amber glass with stenciled lotus blossoms and papyrus buds, representing a united Egypt under the first pharaoh, Menes. Motifs repeated on walls and columns include sun discs, snakes, birds and pharaohs; striped patterns predominate.

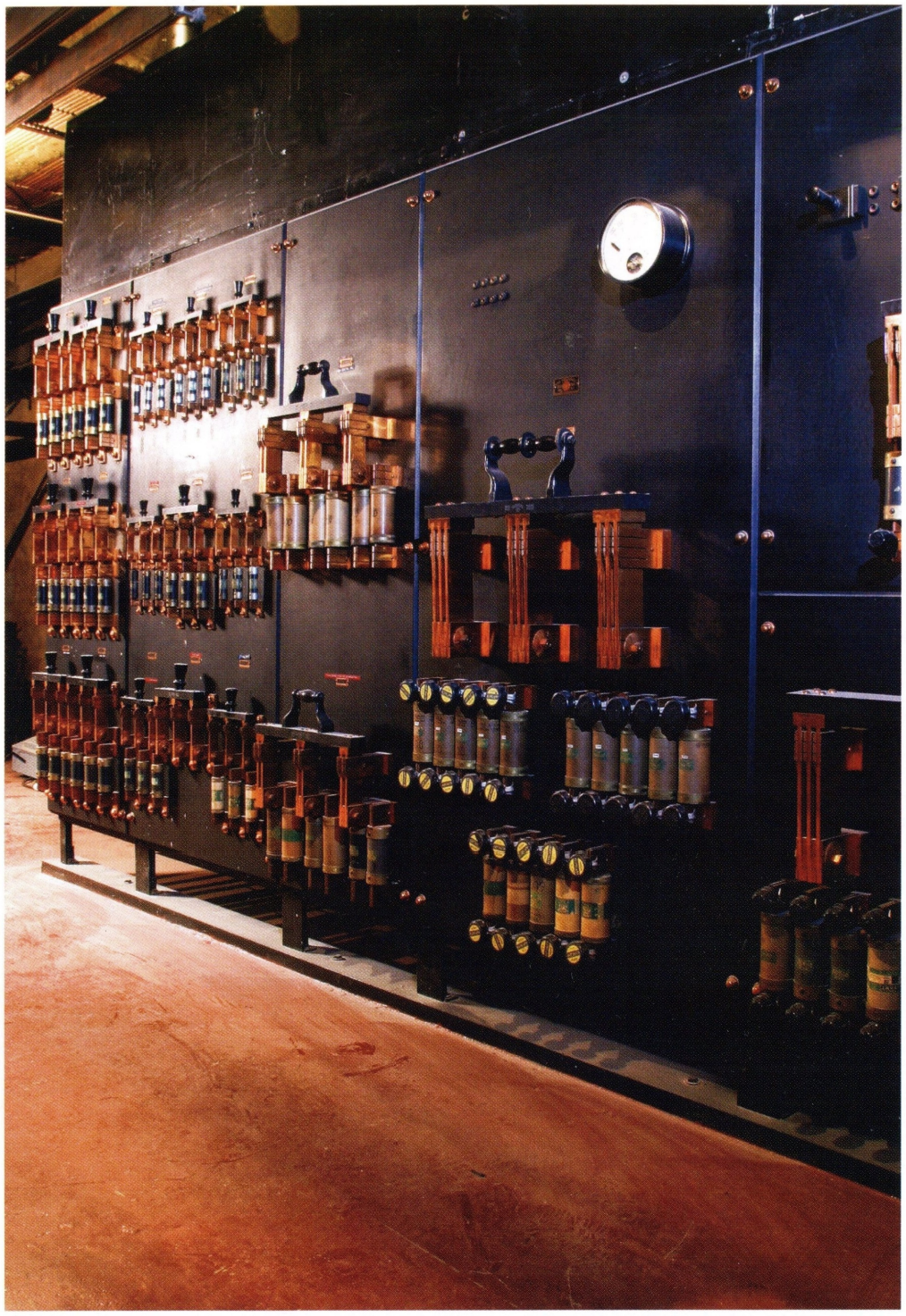
GRAND SALON

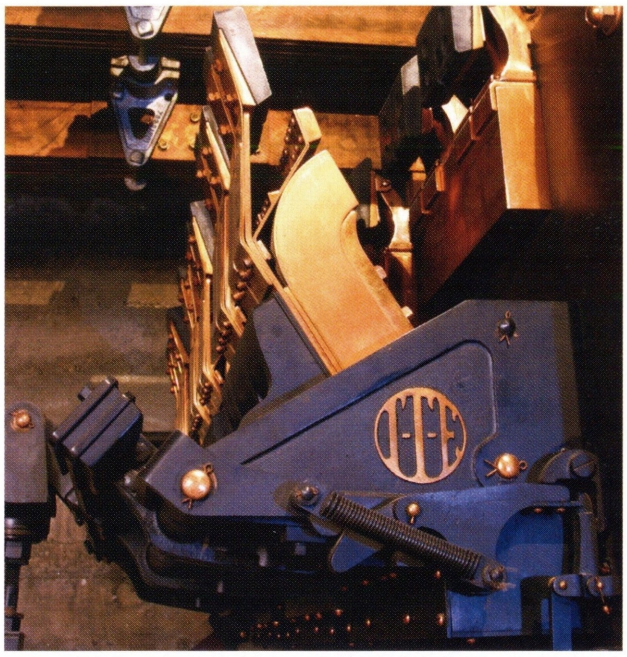
COLOR AND LIGHT

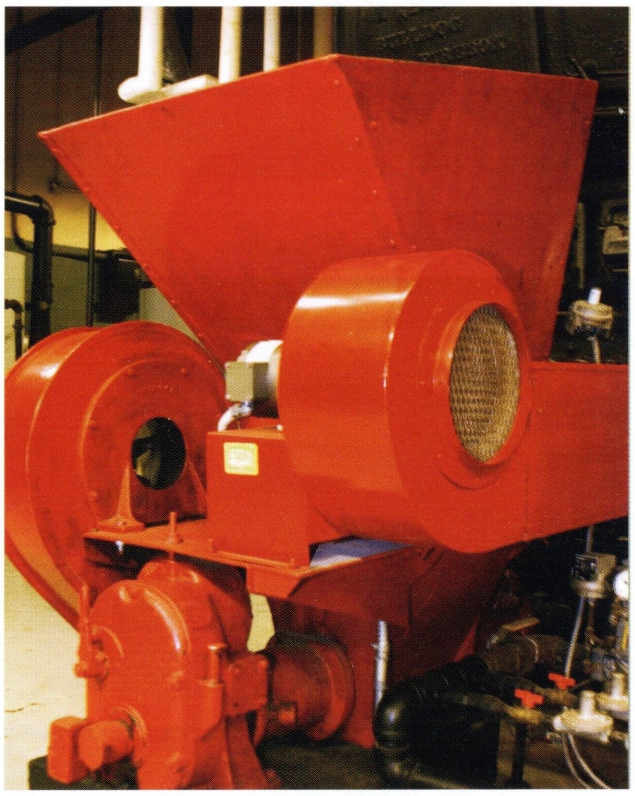
Lights set off a brilliant, stained-glass skylight (top). Furnishings feature abstract designs, in contrast to the figurative depictions in the Egyptian Ballroom. Gilt supports and columns are decorative only (above left); fountain has shell-shaped top (center left), lionhead spout and intricate tile design (center right); rug detail (above right) shows complementary leaf and flower pattern. Elegant again, the salon (facing page) shows off its craftsmanship.

The 3,000 square foot Grand Salon originally was a lounge for the Shriners, designed in Moorish style with massive furnishings and hanging chandeliers whose glass globes appear to be lighted torches. Used for a time as the corporate offices for Mosque Inc.'s owners, the room suffered; drop ceilings covered the stenciled beams and the chandeliers were destroyed (fortunately, the glass in the beautiful stained-glass skylight was found laying intact on the drop ceiling). The room was completely restored in the 1980s: Its colors are based on original finishes; the carpet was replaced in 2003 and is a replication of the original Shriners' carpet; the chandeliers were recreated from old photographs, and other fixtures were found in storerooms.









IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

The catacomb-like underbelly of the theatre houses its technical plant, which is almost as fantastic as the visual arts on the main floors. The original 1929 electrical circuit panel (above and top right) is a work of art; it glimmers with close to $3 million worth of copper. The huge red coal splitter (coal dust was more efficient to burn than lump coal) is kept for historic purposes and admired for its massive good looks. The 1929 Kewanee low pressure boilers (right) for the heating system have been converted from coal to gas, and still provide heat.

CURTAIN CALL

Story Credits:

Written and Edited by Christine Born
with assistance from Diane Casey, Kristi Casey, Teresa Mariano, Jennifer Ritchey Weis

Photos & Art Credits

Cover Photograph by David Cro

Photography by Michael Portman

p. 2: side entrance; **p. 8:** lobby view, hanging lamp; **p. 12:** ladies' lounge side view; **p. 14:** stairway landing; **p. 21:** stage; **p. 23:** organ and latticework organ piping and proscenium arch; **pp. 24-27:** auditorium full view, side entrance, exterior, dress circle promenade, tile fountain; **p. 31:** Egyptian ballroom; **p. 34:** rooftop terrace lamp posts; **p. 35:** rooftop terrace

Photography by David Cro

p. 1: marquee; **p. 5:** rooftop access; **p. 8:** gift counter, handrail bracket, main lobby ceiling; **pp. 9-11:** ladies mezzanine lounge fireplace, pharaoh chair; **p. 12:** decorative urn, plaster bas relief, bench seat; **p. 13:** walnut cabinet, faux window over bench seat, bronze door hardware; **p. 15:** decorative lamp and urn, stairway to lounges; **pp. 16-19:** Settee, bronze lamp detail, men's lower lounge, seat side view detail, stained-glass lamp, art deco bird bath and fluted column, panel of keyhole door, arched passageways, ladies' lower lounge, armchair and lamp; **p. 22:** detail of seat; **pp. 28-30:** tile detail, doors to Grand Stair, Grand Stair to ballrooms, Egyptian room ceiling; **p. 31:** decorative plaster, detail of fireplace panel; **p. 32:** column detail, fountain top, lionhead spout, ceiling support; **p. 33:** Grand Salon; **p. 35:** pillar & lamps; **p. 36:** dressing room, stage rigging; **p. 37:** show graffiti in projection booth and stagehands' lounge, stage rigging, auditorium cooling system detail; **p. 38:** electric circuit panel, boilers; **p. 40:** stage

From the Fox Archives

p. 14: wall decoration; **p. 15:** detail of urn; **p. 23:** detail of organ design; **p. 31:** scarab detail

Photography by JoAnn Carroll

p. 20: brass light fixture; **p. 22:** seating rows; **p. 23:** decorative plaster; **p. 32:** stained-glass window & carpet detail; **p. 35:** archway entrance

Photography by Mike Goettee

p. 2-3: minaret; **p37:** Follies photo

Photography by Keith Dorton

pp. 6-7: ticket kiosk, entrance arcade

This book is dedicated to all those who have worked and continue to work to preserve and restore this magnificent theatre for all the generations to come. The editorial and art design staff of this publication gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following people to this project: Many thanks to Michael Portman for generously allowing us access to his extensive photo files of The Fox Theatre. Also, to: The Atlanta-Journal Constitution, The Atlanta Preservation Center, John A. Busby Jr., Boyd Coons, Molly Fortune, Shelly Kleppsattel, Edgar Neiss, Kathy Roberts, Michele Schuff, and the many people who contributed to the two earlier books in this series.

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